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STATE FOR G/TIP, DRL, AND EAP/MTS
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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS IN MINDANAO: HALFWAY
HOUSE, TIP CONVICTION

REF: A. 07 MANILA 2459 (TIP CONVICTION IN CEBU)
[B. 07 MANILA 2405](#) (AMBASSADOR BREAKS GROUND ON TWO
TIP SHELTERS)
[C. 07 MANILA 1043](#) (NEW TIP CONVICTION IN ZAMBOANGA)

[¶1.](#) SUMMARY: This trafficking in persons (TIP) update includes two significant milestones in the anti-trafficking efforts in Mindanao. On January 11, the Ambassador joined NGO and government partners to cut the ribbon for a newly constructed halfway house for trafficking victims at the Zamboanga port, a historic passageway for migrant workers to and from the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia and a hot spot for trafficking. While Zamboanga City in western Mindanao has been a leader in TIP prosecutions, with two convictions so far, Davao City in eastern Mindanao registered its first TIP conviction in July. END SUMMARY.

Expanding Protection Efforts to Zamboanga

[¶2.](#) On January 11, the Ambassador joined Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF) Executive Director Cecilia Flores-Oebanda and Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat to inaugurate a newly constructed halfway house for trafficking victims at the Zamboanga International Seaport in western Mindanao. This halfway house, the fifth to be constructed under a partnership between VFF and the Philippine Ports Authority, will provide temporary shelter and counseling services to victims and potential victims of trafficking who are intercepted by port employees, law enforcement officers, or shipping operators. VFF will also conduct extensive training with its port and law enforcement partners on how to identify and intercept victims and traffickers aboard vessels. The Zamboanga port is considered the Philippines' backdoor to Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, with regular ferries to the southernmost islands of the Sulu Archipelago, as well as to Sandakan, Malaysia.

[¶3.](#) Media attendance at the event was extensive, leading to prominent articles in regional and national newspapers, featuring the Ambassador's remarks and detailing U.S. assistance to combat trafficking in the Philippines. Multiple grants from USAID and the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons have supported the outreach efforts of VFF at its shelters. A visiting Senate staff delegation from the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, led by Paul Grove, also participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

¶4. The Ambassador praised the Zamboanga City government and the local civil society groups for their relentless commitment to combat TIP in Mindanao. Ongoing collaborative efforts between government and NGOs in Zamboanga led to the country's first conviction under the anti-TIP law in December 2005. In March 2007, a Zamboanga City court handed down another conviction against a member of a criminal syndicate who trafficked victims to a brothel in Sandakan, Malaysia (ref C). The judge and prosecutors in these two cases attended the January 11 ceremony to show their support for victim protection efforts at the Zamboanga port.

¶5. The partnership between the Philippine Ports Authority and VFF dates back to 1999 when the authority agreed to construct VFF's first halfway house at Manila's North Harbor. Since this first successful collaboration, the authority has built additional shelters at the ports of Davao, Batangas, Sorsogon, and most recently, Zamboanga. The shelters have become centers for information sharing and advocacy against TIP, as well as places of temporary sanctuary for thousands of victims intercepted each year. Two additional shelters are expected to open by the summer at the ports in Iloilo in the western Visayas and in Surigao in northeastern Mindanao. The Manila International Airport Authority is also constructing a VFF halfway house that will serve victims at Manila's airport (ref B).

TIP Conviction in Davao City

¶6. Ongoing anti-TIP efforts by government and NGO partners are leading to convictions of traffickers. On July 27, a Davao City trial court judge sentenced a woman to life imprisonment for conspiracy to traffic a minor for sexual exploitation. The judge also ordered the defendant to pay a fine of two million pesos (USD 50,000) and to pay the victim 10,000 pesos (USD 250) in restitution fines. This case was the third trafficking conviction in 2007, following convictions in Zamboanga City (ref C) and Cebu City (ref A).

¶7. In the Davao City case, the victim's aunt recruited the child in August 2003 when the child was only 13 years old. She was sexually exploited for more than two years before she escaped from a brothel in October 2005. After her escape, she immediately went to the police and filed charges against the three perpetrators. Because the victim's family was involved in her abuse, the Department of Social Welfare and Development maintained custody of the child and provided shelter and assistance to her throughout the investigation and trial period. However, two of the three accused in this case, including the aunt of the victim, remain at large.

¶8. Since the passage of the 2003 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law, eight people have been convicted in five separate cases. In 2007, police investigators, private prosecutors, and victims themselves submitted 59 cases of alleged trafficking in persons to the Department of Justice (DOJ) Task Force on Anti-Trafficking in Persons. DOJ prosecutors found sufficient evidence to file charges in court in 29 of these cases. Since 2003, DOJ has filed 161 cases of trafficking in persons in court, but the majority of these cases continue to drag on because of the overburdened Philippine judicial system.

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